

COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

LEARNING HOW TO STAY TOGETHER

It's a fact that almost all couples have arguments.

The conflicts may have to do with money, in-laws, sex, or how to raise the children. Some couples are able to work through these conflicts, while others seem to be torn apart by them. There are many reasons for this, but one way that successful couples deal with their differences is through a combination of honest expression, clear communication, and compromise.

TALK IT OUT

Whenever you become upset with your partner, it's important to discuss your feelings. Talking things over clears the air. It also prevents issues from building and becoming so involved that counseling may be necessary.

Keep in mind, the tone you use makes a difference in how your partner responds. If you use an accusatory tone, this will only put him/her on the defensive and may even make things worse in the long run.



BE HONEST

One common mistake is denying the other person's feelings. If possible, admit that you may be wrong or that you have done the behavior you're discussing. You'll both feel less defensive as a result. Don't assume your partner is "out to get you." Assume he/she just wants you to be happy. "Cooperate" means to "work together." A spirit of cooperation helps you when you're trying to solve a problem. Put yourself in your partner's shoes. What does the problem look like now?

GOING IN STAGES

Generally, working through a disagreement involves three stages. First, tell your partner what's bothering you and then listen to your partner's feelings without commenting, defending, or disagreeing. Second, discuss the details of your disagreements. It's important that only feelings about the specific issue be addressed, not old issues. Third, negotiate until you can reach an agreement or a compromise.

REMEMBER WHY YOU LIKE EACH OTHER

Often children, jobs, or other obligations leave you little time together. You may have even forgotten how much you once liked each other. Try making a list of things you enjoy doing together and schedule a weekly date to do something on your list. You'll probably find that sharing this leisure time allows you to enjoy each other's company. You may even notice you're less likely to argue. Even if you do, you may find it's easier to get through your differences.

KEEPING THE CONNECTION

Staying in touch during separations, whether it's just for the day or for 6 months, takes some forethought. It involves planning in advance how you and your partner will communicate, and how often. There are many ways to show each other you care while apart. Aside from the standard letters, postcards, phone calls and email, you might want to try some of these ideas:

- Turn on a cassette recorder while you're working in the kitchen, walking the dog, enjoying the sunset, etc. and talk to your partner as if he/she was standing next to you.
- Before separation, hide notes in your partner's belongings or around the house.
- Take pictures of the two of you together and by yourselves. Order extra prints — a set for you and a set for your partner.
- Make arrangements for flowers, gifts, care packages, etc. to be delivered on special days while you are apart.
- Send a memento or object which symbolizes a special memory of time spent together.



CAN WE TALK?

TIPS FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION SKILLS

STOP

If you're in the middle of an argument with your partner and you feel your anger getting out of control, stop! Take a minute to take a breather. Give yourself some time to cool off and to regain your composure.

LOOK

Pay attention to your body language. You may not even be aware of the negative message you're sending with such simple gestures as crossing your arms or not looking at your partner.

LISTEN

Try to be a good listener. Pay attention to what your partner is saying. Clear your mind from distractions and focus on your partner.

THEN TALK

Now it's your turn. Make sure you understand what your partner has said before you state your feelings. And be ready to compromise! Compromise is often the answer to ensure both parties are satisfied with the outcome of the discussion.

**A SPIRIT OF COOPERATION
HELPS YOU WHEN YOU'RE
TRYING TO SOLVE A PROBLEM.**

A LISTENING CHECKLIST

HERE ARE TEN WAYS YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR LISTENING:

- Take time or schedule time.
- Eliminate distractions.
- Look at your partner.
- Give non-verbal encouragement and support. Nod or make neutral comments.
- Ask questions without making interruptions.
- Be patient. Give partner time to respond.
- Respond without judgment. Respect partner's point of view.
- Note emphasis on words, loudness, or speed of speech and body language to check your partner's state of mind.
- Repeat what you think was said. Ask about feelings.
- Pay attention to what your partner is saying, not to how you will respond.

**TO BE A GOOD LISTENER,
PAY ATTENTION AND TRY TO
THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR
PARTNER FEELS. YOU'LL FIND
THAT GOOD LISTENING SKILLS
PAY OFF IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP.**



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